The Coronation Machine: Joan of Arc and the Theology of Factional Victory

A Case Study in Belief Infrastructure Appropriation During the Hundred Years' War, 1428–1456

Thomas J. Bryan *with Claude (Anthropic) · February 2026*

A Note on What This Case Is Actually About

The standard account of Joan of Arc asks us to choose between two interpretations: the miracle version, in which a peasant girl genuinely received divine messages and through faith alone transformed the military and political fortunes of France, and the debunking version, in which she was either deluded, manipulated, or some combination of both, with her victories attributable to military professionals and her execution attributable to political convenience. Both versions make the same analytical error. They focus on Joan.

Joan is not what this case is about. This case is about a factional battle for control of France between two elite coalitions — the Armagnac faction supporting Charles VII's claim to the French throne, and the Burgundian-English coalition supporting the English claim under Henry VI — in which one faction faced a specific institutional problem that military force alone could not solve and reached for the available theological infrastructure to solve it. Joan was the mechanism through which the appropriation was accomplished. Understanding her that way — not as the story's protagonist but as the instrument of a specific institutional operation — is what reveals what actually happened and why it matters.

The case sits at the intersection of two analytical lines this series has developed. From the comparative civilizational cases, it demonstrates the standard appropriation mechanism: pre-existing belief infrastructure, available for use, deployed by a constrained elite faction to legitimate a power arrangement that material force alone cannot fully establish. From the analysis of Western civilization's factional cycling, it demonstrates the specific Western pattern: two elite factions competing for the same throne, each needing theological legitimation for their claim, each deploying the available belief infrastructure as a weapon in a contest whose real stakes were land, revenue, and dynastic survival. The Hundred Years' War was not primarily a national conflict. It was a civil war among elites, and the battle over Joan's theological status — divine messenger or demonic deceiver — was the ideological dimension of that civil war, fought in the register of sacred legitimacy because that was the register that mattered most.

The sources are unusually rich for a medieval case. The trial records from both Joan's condemnation in 1431 and her rehabilitation in 1456 are among the most extensively documented judicial proceedings in medieval history, produced by opposing elite factions for opposing political purposes, and therefore readable against each other in ways that reveal the mechanism each was deploying. The contemporary chronicles, the diplomatic correspondence, the administrative records of Charles VII's court — all survived in quantities that make the political calculation behind the theological performances unusually visible.

I. The Institutional Problem: What Charles VII Actually Needed

By the autumn of 1428, when Joan of Arc was preparing her journey to find the Dauphin, the situation of Charles VII — the man who would become King of France through her agency — requires precise description, because what he needed was not what the standard narrative says he needed.

He did not primarily need military victories. He had an army. La Hire, the Bastard of Orléans, Arthur de Richemont — the commanders in his service were experienced professionals whose capacity to fight the English in the field was constrained not by incompetence but by the logistical and financial conditions that sustained military operations. The siege of Orléans was a strategic crisis, but a military one that military resources could in principle address, given adequate supply and reinforcement.

What Charles needed was something that military resources could not directly provide: legitimate authority to be King of France.

This requires explanation, because Charles VII holding the title King of France seems, from the retrospective vantage of his eventual success, to have been a settled question. It was not. The Treaty of Troyes, negotiated in 1420 between Henry V of England, Philip the Good of Burgundy, and the French king Charles VI — who was intermittently insane and effectively managed by whoever held him at any given moment — had established a legal framework for French succession that disinherited the Dauphin Charles entirely. The treaty declared that Henry V, through his marriage to Catherine of Valois, would inherit France upon Charles VI's death, bypassing the Dauphin on the grounds — explicitly stated in the treaty — of offenses committed against the French crown. Henry V died before Charles VI, and so the claim passed to the infant Henry VI, who was formally crowned King of France in Paris in 1431. The Treaty of Troyes was not an English propaganda document. It was a multilateral agreement signed by the King of France himself, endorsed by the Burgundian faction that controlled the largest territorial and military power in the region, and ratified by the Parlement of Paris — the highest legal authority in the French kingdom.

Compounding this legal problem was a dynastic one. Queen Isabeau of Bavaria — Charles's own mother — had explicitly called his legitimacy into question. Her statement that Charles was not the son of Charles VI, made in the context of the Treaty of Troyes negotiations, was politically motivated, but it had been made and could not be unmade. The question of whether the Dauphin was a legitimate heir, raised by his own mother and embedded in the most important treaty of the period, was not a question that military victories could answer.

Charles controlled territory — the Loire valley, the south, regions that had not submitted to the Burgundian-English arrangement. He had courts, officials, revenue. What he lacked was the specific sacral legitimation that French political culture required for a king to be genuinely, theologically, uncontestably the king: anointing at Reims Cathedral with the holy oil that tradition held had descended from heaven for the baptism of Clovis, performed by the Archbishop of Reims, in the presence of the holy ampulla that made the ceremony not a human act but a divine one. Without this, Charles was a claimant. The Treaty of Troyes was legally valid. Henry VI was formally the king. The Burgundians and the Parlement of Paris were not simply wrong.

Reims was in English-controlled territory. Getting Charles to Reims for a coronation was not primarily a military problem. It was a theological one: you could not march a contested claimant through hostile territory to perform a ceremony that assumed his legitimacy and expect the ceremony to accomplish anything. The coronation's theological power depended on its being received as divine confirmation of a rightful claim, not as a military imposition of a factional one. What Charles needed, before the coronation could do its work, was something that could cut through the legal framework of the Treaty of Troyes in the one register where law and treaty had no standing: direct divine communication. If God himself, speaking through a chosen vessel, declared Charles the true king — if the voice of Heaven contradicted the signatures of Troyes — then no treaty and no rival coronation could compete with that authority.

This is the institutional problem that Joan solved. Not the siege of Orléans, though she helped solve that. Not the military campaign to Reims, though she led it. The fundamental problem she solved was theological: she provided the divine declaration of Charles's legitimacy that made the subsequent coronation not a political act but a sacred confirmation, and that gave Charles's supporters in France and across Europe a framework for understanding his authority that the Treaty of Troyes could not accommodate.

II. The Infrastructure Available for Appropriation

The specific belief infrastructure that made Joan's role possible had been developing in French religious culture for generations before her birth, and its relevance to the crisis of 1428 was not invented by the Armagnac faction. It was available, widely known, and required only identification of a suitable vessel to be activated.

The prophetic tradition surrounding French kingship was ancient and elaborate. The Salic law that governed French succession, the tradition of coronation at Reims, the legend of the holy ampulla, and the theology of the Most Christian King — the title that distinguished French kingship from other European monarchies as specially protected and divinely favored — all constituted a framework within which divine intervention in French political affairs was not merely possible but expected. God had a specific relationship with France and with its kings. When French kingship was threatened, divine response was appropriate and anticipated.

Within this broader framework, two specific prophetic traditions proved directly relevant. The Merlin prophecy — circulating in vernacular French literature since at least the thirteenth century — predicted that France would be lost by a woman and saved by a maiden from the borders of Lorraine. The woman who had lost France was readily identifiable as Queen Isabeau, whose signature on the Treaty of Troyes had effectively transferred the French succession to England. The maiden from the borders of Lorraine who would save it was equally readily applicable to Joan, who came from Domrémy, a village in the march between the Duchy of Lorraine and the kingdom of France — literally on the borders. The prophecy was not invented for Joan. It preceded her by at least a century and was circulating in texts she almost certainly never read. What made it powerful was that her actual biography, her actual geographical origin, her actual gender fit the prophetic template with the kind of specificity that made the match look like foreknowledge rather than coincidence.

The second relevant tradition was the theology of the virgin warrior — the tradition of female saints who had wielded spiritual and occasionally physical power through their exceptional purity. Catherine of Alexandria, Margaret of Antioch, and Michael the Archangel — the three figures Joan named as her voices — were among the most widely venerated figures in fifteenth-century French popular religion. Their specific attributes — Catherine's wisdom and theological argument, Margaret's victory over the dragon, Michael's military role as the warrior angel of God's army — mapped directly onto what a divine military mission would require. The voices Joan heard, whatever their ultimate nature, drew on imagery so deeply embedded in the popular religious consciousness that when she described them, her audiences recognized the types immediately. She was not introducing unfamiliar theological figures. She was reporting contact with beings whose nature and function her audiences already understood.

What the Armagnac elite needed, in the winter of 1428–1429, was a figure who could embody this available prophetic infrastructure with sufficient credibility to make the theological claim stick. The claim itself — that God had intervened in the French succession dispute, that the true king had divine sanction — required a vessel. Joan presented herself as that vessel at exactly the moment when the need was acute and the institutional infrastructure for validating such claims was available.

III. The Evaluation: Poitiers and the Strategic Question

Joan arrived at Chinon in late February 1429 and secured an audience with Charles VII — how she did this, through what intermediaries and with what preliminary assessments by those intermediaries, is itself a question whose answer reveals the network of Armagnac courtiers who managed her access. She was not simply admitted to the king's presence because her claims were extraordinary. Extraordinary claimants to divine mandates were not uncommon in fifteenth-century France, and most were turned away or referred to local ecclesiastical authorities. Joan reached the king because people with access to the king decided she should, which means people with access to the king had already made a preliminary assessment that her claims were potentially useful.

The examination at Poitiers, conducted in March 1429 by a commission of theologians assembled at Charles's request, is the case's most analytically transparent moment. The commission included some of the most learned ecclesiastical figures in Armagnac-controlled France — bishops, masters of theology, senior clergy. Their task was framed as determining whether Joan's claimed divine mandate was authentic, which is to say whether her voices came from God rather than from the devil or from her own disordered imagination. This framing made theological sense within the medieval framework: the church maintained that divine visions were real, that demonic deception was equally real, and that distinguishing between them required learned examination.

But the examination that actually occurred was not primarily a theological inquiry into the nature of Joan's experiences. It was a strategic assessment of whether those experiences could be safely deployed for political purposes. The questions the commission asked were designed to establish three things: whether Joan's claims were heretical in a way that would make appropriating them dangerous; whether her personal conduct was sufficiently consistent with the virgin-warrior profile that her claims required; and whether the prophetic framework she embodied was sufficiently recognizable to the educated ecclesiastical audience that would need to validate her publicly.

The commission's conclusion — preserved in fragmentary form in later accounts — was in essence: we find no evil in her; her faith is orthodox; given the desperate necessity of the kingdom's situation, the king may make use of her. That concluding phrase — *given the desperate necessity of the kingdom's situation* — is the document's most revealing moment. It was not a theological finding. It was a political one. The commission was not certifying divine origin, which was epistemologically impossible. It was certifying political usability, which was the actual question they had been assembled to answer.

The physical examination of Joan's virginity, conducted by ladies of the court rather than by the theological commission, addressed a different but related concern. The virgin warrior tradition required actual virginity — not as a theological nicety but as the specific physical condition that the tradition held enabled divine communication. If Joan were not a virgin, the entire prophetic template collapsed. The examination confirmed she was. This was reported and recorded, and the record served a specific function: it made the virgin-warrior claim empirically grounded rather than merely asserted, which made it harder to attack on the grounds that would otherwise be most obvious.

What Poitiers accomplished was institutional validation at the level required for public deployment. The theological commission's endorsement gave Charles's court the cover to present Joan to the army and to the broader public as divinely mandated without incurring the charge of credulously sponsoring a heretic or a fraud. The validation was not genuine theological certainty — the commission said as much, framing its conclusion in terms of necessity rather than proof. It was sufficient institutional authority to make the appropriation operationally viable.

IV. The Military Campaigns: Belief as Force Multiplier

The relief of Orléans in May 1429 and the subsequent Loire campaign that cleared the English from the river valley have been analyzed primarily as military events, and as military events they involve real tactical decisions, real professional commanders, and real logistical achievements that Joan did not accomplish alone. What the military analysis consistently underweights is the specific contribution of the theological dimension — not as a vague matter of morale but as a concrete operational factor that changed what the army could accomplish with the material resources it possessed.

The French forces attempting to relieve Orléans before Joan's arrival were not incapable. They were operating in an environment where the strategic costs of failure were high, where the consequences of another defeat for Charles's already precarious legitimacy were potentially terminal, and where this calculation produced in professional commanders the rational caution that military professionals exercise when institutional survival depends on not losing. Armies that cannot afford defeats do not take the risks that victories require.

Joan's arrival changed this calculation not by improving the military situation materially but by reframing the theological stakes of the engagement. If the army was fighting under divine mandate — if Joan's presence was evidence that God had chosen their cause — then the consequences of failure were no longer merely political. Failure would be evidence of divine abandonment, which French troops in 1429 were not theologically equipped to accept as a possible outcome of a divinely mandated mission. Success, conversely, would confirm the divine mandate and produce the kind of commitment to subsequent operations that no purely material incentive could replicate.

The specific accounts of Joan's conduct at Orléans — her insistence on direct assault rather than the cautious maneuvering that professional commanders preferred, her presence at the walls during the assault on Les Tourelles, her continuation of the attack after being wounded by a crossbow bolt — are consistent with someone operating from genuine conviction about divine protection rather than from tactical calculation about risk. Whether that conviction was theologically warranted is analytically irrelevant. Its operational effect was to commit forces to engagements that more cautious commanders would have avoided, and on these specific occasions the commitment worked.

The English forces at Orléans were also affected by the theological dimension, though differently. The arrival of a figure whose divine mandate had received institutional ecclesiastical validation, whose prophetic profile matched the circulating Lorraine-maiden tradition, and whose initial military successes were being narrated as miraculous, created in the English besiegers exactly the uncertainty about divine favor that was most damaging to an army already at the end of a long siege line. Reports of Joan's mandate had reached the English camp before her forces arrived. The soldiers who held the boulevard of the Tourelles on May 7 were not merely facing a French assault. They were facing, from within their own theological framework, the possibility that they were fighting against God's chosen instrument — and the theological consequences of that, in the medieval worldview, were considerably worse than military defeat.

The psychological leverage this provided was real and was understood as real by the Armagnac leadership. The campaign's speed after Orléans — the Loire valley cleared in less than two weeks, Patay fought and won, the march to Reims accomplished without the prolonged siege operations that would normally have been required — reflects in part the effect of the theological dimension on the resistance of communities and garrisons along the route. Several towns opened their gates to Charles's advancing army without fighting, and the contemporary accounts consistently identify Joan's presence, and the divine mandate she embodied, as the factor that made resistance seem both militarily and theologically futile.

V. Reims: The Point of the Entire Exercise

The coronation of Charles VII at Reims Cathedral on July 17, 1429, is the event that the preceding military campaign existed to make possible, and understanding it requires understanding what a medieval coronation actually accomplished — not ceremonially but institutionally.

The French coronation was not a celebration of existing authority. It was a sacramental act — a ceremony understood by participants and observers within the medieval theological framework as genuinely transformative in the same category as baptism or ordination. The anointing with the holy oil from the ampulla — oil that tradition held had been sent from heaven for the baptism of Clovis in 498 CE and that had been preserved since in a vial at Reims — was not symbolic. Within the theological framework that all parties to the Hundred Years' War shared, it was the mechanism through which God's favor was specifically conferred on the French king. An unanointed Charles VII was a claimant. An anointed Charles VII was the Most Christian King, bearer of a divine mandate that no treaty, no rival coronation, no legal argument could supersede, because it operated in a register where human legal instruments had no standing.

Henry VI had been crowned King of France in Paris in December 1431 — but at Notre-Dame de Paris, not at Reims, and with oil brought from England rather than from the holy ampulla. The coronation was performed, but the specific sacral technology of the Reims ceremony — the cathedral, the archbishop, the ampulla — was absent. English and Burgundian propagandists

tried to argue that this made no practical difference. French theologians and popular religious consciousness disagreed, and the disagreement mattered because in the medieval framework, the question of which coronation was theologically valid was the question of which king was genuinely king.

Charles VII's coronation at Reims on July 17, performed by the Archbishop of Reims with the holy ampulla, with Joan of Arc standing beside him holding her standard, accomplished the institutional transformation that the entire preceding campaign had been designed to achieve. Charles was now anointed. His authority now rested not on the contested claims of Armagnac lawyers but on the same sacral foundation that had legitimated French kings since the Merovingians. The Treaty of Troyes, however legally sophisticated, could not undo what the ampulla had done. The question of his legitimacy, which had been the fundamental political problem of his reign, was answered in the only register in which it could be definitively answered: the theological one.

Joan's presence at the coronation, holding her standard in the cathedral, was both testimony to the campaign that had made the event possible and a visual claim about its theological significance. Her standard — white, bearing the image of Christ in judgment, the names of Jesus and Mary, and the fleur-de-lis — had been present at Orléans, at Patay, at each stage of the march. Its presence at Reims connected the coronation to the divine mandate under whose authority the campaign had been conducted. Joan later said, when asked why her standard rather than those of other commanders was honored at the coronation: "It had shared in the labor; it was right that it should share in the honor." The statement is simple and probably sincere. Its function in the ceremony was to perform, in visible symbolic terms, the claim that the coronation was the fulfillment of a divine mission rather than the culmination of a factional military campaign.

VI. After the Coronation: The Problem of Autonomous Divine Authority

The military and political situation after the coronation of July 1429 was substantially transformed, and the transformation created a new problem that the Armagnac leadership had not fully anticipated: Joan's continued presence as an autonomous authority claiming divine mandate.

Before the coronation, Joan's divine mandate and the Armagnac faction's institutional interests were aligned. Both pointed toward the same objective: getting Charles to Reims. After the coronation, the alignment broke down. The Armagnac leadership's strategic priority shifted from military expansion to political consolidation — above all, to negotiating a settlement with Philip the Good of Burgundy that would detach the Burgundian faction from its alliance with England and allow Charles to consolidate control of the kingdom without the continued expense and risk

of military campaigning. This required diplomacy, compromise, and the kind of political flexibility that divine mandates constrain.

Joan's voices had different priorities. They told her to press on — to Paris, to liberate all of France, to continue the military mission until English forces were expelled from the kingdom entirely. Joan pursued this agenda with the conviction that divine mandate produced, pushing for the assault on Paris in September 1429 over the reservations of commanders who judged the operation militarily premature. The assault failed. Charles withdrew. The military momentum of the summer dissipated.

The problem this created for Charles's court was structural. Joan's divine mandate had been useful precisely because it was unconditional and non-negotiable — you cannot haggle with the voice of God, and an army that believes it fights under divine protection fights differently than one that knows it is fighting for a feudal lord's political interests. But unconditional divine mandates are difficult to manage when the political strategy requires compromise. Joan's voices told her that the truces Charles's negotiators were arranging with Burgundy were contrary to God's will. If the voices were genuine — if Joan was what the Poitiers commission had certified her to be — then the truces were indeed contrary to God's will, and Charles was acting against his divine mandate by pursuing them. The theological validation that had made Joan useful in the coronation campaign was now creating a theological constraint on post-coronation political management.

Joan's capture at Compiègne in May 1430 — taken by Burgundian forces during a sortie that she led without adequate cavalry support — resolved this problem. She was captured in the field during an operation that Charles's court had not specifically authorized or supported, by the Burgundian forces with whom Charles's diplomats were simultaneously negotiating. Charles made no serious ransom effort. The Duke of Burgundy sold her to the English. Charles was free to continue his Burgundian negotiations without the constraint of a figure who believed those negotiations were contrary to divine will.

Whether this sequence involved deliberate abandonment — whether Charles's court allowed Joan to be captured or simply failed to prevent it — cannot be established from the available evidence. What can be established is the institutional logic: Joan's capture solved a specific management problem that her divine mandate had created, and the people who benefited from that solution were the people best positioned to have arranged it. The mechanism does not require conspiracy. It requires only that the people managing Charles's political interests recognized, when the opportunity arose, that rescue was less valuable than the freedom from constraint that her captivity provided.

VII. The Trial: The Counter-Belief-Infrastructure Operation

The English trial of Joan of Arc, conducted at Rouen from January to May 1431 and resulting in her burning as a relapsed heretic, is typically presented as a judicial atrocity — the use of ecclesiastical process to destroy a political enemy through false charges. This is accurate but incomplete. The trial was a judicial atrocity and an ideological operation, and understanding it as the latter reveals what the English and their Burgundian allies understood about what Joan had actually accomplished.

The English problem was not that Joan had won military victories. Military victories could be reversed, and the English position in France remained substantial even after the coronation campaign. The problem was that the coronation had happened — that Charles VII was now anointed at Reims, that the theological legitimacy of the English claim had been challenged in the register that mattered most, and that the instrument of that challenge was still alive, still claiming divine mandate, still capable of inspiring French resistance simply by her existence as a prisoner. If Joan's divine mandate was genuine — and the Poitiers commission's endorsement had given it institutional standing — then Charles VII's coronation had divine sanction, the English claim was contrary to God's will, and every English soldier in France was fighting against the purposes of the Almighty.

The trial was designed to destroy this claim at the theological level. If Joan could be convicted of heresy — if an ecclesiastical court could establish that her voices came from the devil rather than from God, that her disobedience to the church's authority demonstrated not divine independence but demonic pride, that the virginity that anchored the prophetic template was compromised or the modesty that made it credible was violated — then the theological foundation of Charles's coronation was retroactively undermined. She would not merely be a prisoner. She would be a proven false prophet, whose "divine mandate" had been established as diabolic fraud. And if Joan was a heretic and a fraud, then Charles's coronation had been performed under a diabolic rather than divine mandate, and the Treaty of Troyes was still the legitimate framework for French succession.

The trial's conduct reveals the sophistication of this operation. The charges were carefully constructed to avoid the obvious weakness of simply claiming Joan was lying. Instead, the prosecution focused on issues of ecclesiastical obedience: Joan claimed her voices were more authoritative than the judgment of the church, she wore male clothing against ecclesiastical prohibition, she had made prophetic claims that had not been fulfilled. These charges framed the issue not as false visions versus true visions — a theological question that was genuinely impossible to resolve — but as proper submission to church authority versus improper self-assertion of autonomous divine contact. The question that the prosecution needed to answer was not "did God speak to Joan?" but "did Joan properly subject her claimed experiences to ecclesiastical authority?" The latter question had a legally answerable form within the canonical framework governing the examination of visions.

The seventy assessors and consultants — all drawn from the English-allied ecclesiastical establishment, primarily from the University of Paris — were not random collection of learned men. They were the institutional representatives of the theological authority that the English needed to deploy against the Armagnac theological validation. The University of Paris had been

the most prestigious theological faculty in Europe. Its condemnation of Joan would, within the theological framework that both sides operated in, carry weight comparable to the Poitiers commission's endorsement. It was the counter-establishment, brought to bear against the establishment that had authorized Joan's mission.

Joan's conduct during the trial — her responses to the interrogations, her refusal to submit to what she understood as an unjust tribunal, her eventual abjuration and subsequent relapse, her death — is the record of an individual under conditions of severe institutional coercion, and it rewards close reading. What is analytically significant is the specific theological point on which she refused to yield even under extreme pressure: the authority of her voices. She was willing to submit to the church in principle. She was not willing to affirm that her voices had been demonic or that Charles's divine mandate was invalid, because to do so would have been to deny the core claim on which the entire preceding operation had rested. Her consistency on this point, even as she made tactical concessions on lesser matters, suggests that she understood — perhaps better than her captors anticipated — that this was the specific claim whose destruction the trial existed to accomplish.

Her burning on May 30, 1431, was the English side's assertion that the destruction had been accomplished. Joan of Arc, condemned heretic, tool of demonic fraud, had been eliminated and her fraudulent divine mandate exposed. The coronation that had rested on that mandate was now, within the theological framework the trial had established, the product of diabolic deception rather than divine commission.

The claim did not stick. The English needed not just a trial verdict but a population willing to receive it as the definitive theological finding, and the populations of France — including those in English-controlled territories — were not willing. The narrative had already been too successfully established, the coronation too publicly performed, the religious infrastructure of the prophetic tradition too deeply embedded in popular consciousness for a judicial verdict to reverse what the sacramental act had accomplished. You can execute Joan. You cannot un-anoint Charles VII.

VIII. The Rehabilitation: Constructing the Founding Myth

Twenty-five years after Joan's execution, Charles VII — now securely King of France, having expelled the English from all French territory save Calais by 1453 — initiated the ecclesiastical process that resulted in the reversal of her heresy conviction and her formal rehabilitation. The rehabilitation trial, completed in 1456, declared the 1431 condemnation null and void, established Joan as an innocent martyr, and laid the theological foundation for her eventual canonization as a saint.

The rehabilitation is the case's final analytical moment, and it is as revealing as the original appropriation. By 1456, the institutional needs that had made Joan useful in 1429 had been

substantially superseded, and new needs had emerged. Charles VII no longer needed divine validation of his coronation — he had ruled for twenty-seven years, had expelled the English, and had consolidated royal authority over the French nobility in ways that made retrospective questions about his legitimacy largely moot as practical political matters. What he needed was a founding myth for the Valois monarchy — a narrative about the providential character of French kingship that would serve the regime's long-term legitimating requirements.

Joan as martyred saint served this purpose with a precision that Joan as controversial figure of contested theological status could not. A saint who had died to establish the legitimacy of the current dynasty was the ideal legitimating narrative: it made the Valois monarchy the product of divine providence rather than factional victory, it retroactively condemned the English and Burgundian alliance as the persecution of holiness, and it created a permanent sacred narrative around which French royal identity could organize itself. The rehabilitation was also useful against any surviving questions about Charles's failure to rescue Joan — reframing her death as martyrdom rather than as abandonment made Charles the recipient of the sacrifice rather than its cause.

The specific theological moves of the rehabilitation trial reveal the sophisticated institutional engineering involved. The prosecution of the 1431 trial was attacked not on the grounds that its theological findings were wrong — that Joan's voices genuinely came from God, which was the core claim — but on procedural grounds: that the tribunal had been improperly constituted, that the charges had been maliciously constructed, that the abjuration had been obtained under duress. This framing preserved the possibility of theological reversal while avoiding the epistemological impossibility of definitively establishing the divine origin of visions. The court did not certify that Joan had genuinely heard God. It certified that the process that had condemned her was procedurally void, which legally achieved the same result while remaining on legally defensible ground.

The witnesses assembled for the rehabilitation were drawn from Joan's surviving contemporaries — people who had known her at Domrémy, at the courts she had visited, in the campaigns she had led. Their testimony was overwhelmingly favorable, which is unremarkable given that the tribunal conducting the examination was sponsored by the French crown and structured to produce a specific outcome. The testimony nonetheless records genuine historical memory of Joan's conduct, her character, her military presence, and the responses of those around her, and it is one of the richest documentary records of popular religious experience and elite management of that experience in the medieval period.

The myth that the rehabilitation established — Joan as the divinely sent virgin warrior who saved France and gave Charles VII his rightful throne — proved extraordinarily durable. It survived the end of the Valois dynasty. It survived the Wars of Religion. It survived the Bourbon monarchy. The French Revolution found Joan awkward — a divine mandate for royal authority had limited appeal in a republic committed to popular sovereignty — but the Revolution's own logic of national destiny could accommodate her if the divine element was translated into nationalist terms. Napoleon rehabilitated her as a symbol of French military spirit. The Third Republic, seeking unifying national symbols that could bridge the religious-secular divide that

had split French politics since the Revolution, found Joan uniquely serviceable: she was a Catholic saint who had also been condemned by an ecclesiastical court, giving both the clerical right and the anticlerical left something to work with. She was formally canonized in 1920.

The successive appropriations of Joan's myth by regimes whose fundamental commitments were often contradictory to each other — absolute monarchy, revolutionary republic, Napoleonic empire, Third Republic, and eventually Vichy France, which also claimed her — constitute the most complete demonstration in this series of the durability of a successfully established belief infrastructure narrative. The myth outlasted every political arrangement that had created it. It was available for appropriation by every subsequent elite faction that found it useful, precisely because it had been so thoroughly embedded in the foundational narrative of French identity that it could not be easily discarded without destabilizing something deeper than any particular political arrangement.

IX. The Factional Cycling and the Western Pattern

Joan of Arc's case connects to the broader analysis of Western civilization's distinctive pattern of elite factional cycling in ways that the case's medieval setting makes easy to overlook.

The Hundred Years' War was not primarily a conflict between nations, though it has been retrospectively narrated as one. It was a conflict between two aristocratic factions — the Armagnac coalition supporting the Valois claim and the Burgundian-English coalition supporting the Plantagenet/Lancaster claim — over control of the French throne and its associated revenues, lands, and political power. The factions were ethnically mixed, dynastically connected, and ideologically overlapping. The Burgundian dukes were French princes. English aristocrats held French lands and French titles. The battle lines were not drawn by nationality but by the specific dynastic and political interests of specific elite families at specific moments, which shifted with marriages, deaths, and political calculations throughout the conflict.

Into this factional battle, belief infrastructure was deployed as a weapon on both sides. The English claim rested on the theological validity of the Treaty of Troyes — a framework of dynastic law sanctioned by the established ecclesiastical authorities, including the University of Paris. The Armagnac claim rested ultimately on the theology of sacral kingship — the tradition that the Most Christian King derived his authority from the divine anointing that no treaty could supersede. Joan was the mechanism through which the Armagnac faction activated this tradition against the English legal framework. Her divine mandate was the theological counter-argument to the Treaty of Troyes, operating in the register where treaty law could not follow.

The English counter-operation — the trial — was the attempt to deploy the theological establishment's authority against Joan's divine mandate claim. The University of Paris's condemnation was the counter-belief-infrastructure operation: using the most prestigious

theological authority available to the English alliance to establish that Joan's claim was fraudulent. The fact that this counter-operation failed — that the condemnation did not stick, that the population of France did not receive it as the definitive theological finding — reflects not the inherent superiority of the Armagnac theological claim but the prior successful embedding of the prophetic infrastructure that Joan embodied. The Maid-of-Lorraine tradition was older and more deeply rooted in popular consciousness than any verdict the University of Paris could produce. You cannot displace a tradition that has been present for a century with a trial that takes five months.

Seen this way, the Joan of Arc case is the Hundred Years' War's version of the dynamic that Henry VIII would deploy against Rome a century later: a constrained elite faction reaching for the available theological infrastructure to legitimate a power arrangement that material force alone could not establish. Henry needed to remove the papal mediating authority that blocked his institutional requirements. Charles needed to activate the sacral kingship tradition that the Treaty of Troyes had attempted to legally supersede. Both reached for available elements of Western civilization's dual legitimating infrastructure — operating within the Judeo-Christian tradition but at points where specific theological resources could be weaponized against the specific arrangement that the constrained faction needed to change.

The connection to the wider series of cases is also visible. Joan's appropriation by the Armagnac faction follows the standard mechanism: pre-existing belief infrastructure (the Maid-of-Lorraine prophecy, the virgin warrior tradition, the theology of the Most Christian King) is available and genuinely held by the population; a constrained elite faction (Charles VII's court, facing the specific institutional problem of unrecognized coronation) deploys a figure who embodies the pre-existing template; institutional validation is arranged (the Poitiers commission); the belief's force multiplication effect operates (at Orléans, at Patay, on the road to Reims); the specific institutional problem is solved (the coronation); the figure whose charismatic authority had been useful becomes an autonomous constraint; her removal solves the management problem; and the subsequent rehabilitation constructs the founding myth in its most durable form.

The element this case adds that no other case in this series provides quite as directly is the battle over the theological status of a single individual as the ideological dimension of an elite factional conflict. The Armagnac faction needed Joan's voices to be divine. The English-Burgundian faction needed them to be demonic. Both sides understood that the answer to this theological question determined the theological legitimacy of the French crown, which determined the practical political question of who governed France. The trial was not a distraction from the real political conflict. It was the real political conflict, conducted in the register where the stakes were highest.

X. Framework Assessment: What Joan Adds

The Joan of Arc case adds three specific contributions to the framework's cumulative argument that could not be made as clearly from any other case in the series.

The single figure as the appropriation's mechanism. Every other appropriation examined in this series operates through institutional deployment — the temple economy, the law code, the examination system, the covenant text. The Joan case shows how individual charismatic authority can serve as the mechanism for activating a pre-existing belief tradition in a way that institutional deployment cannot replicate. The Maid-of-Lorraine prophecy had been available for a century. The theology of sacral coronation had been available for centuries longer. What made them operational in 1429 was the specific embodiment of both traditions in a single figure whose biography, gender, geographical origin, and claimed experiences fit the prophetic template with sufficient precision to make the match look like confirmation rather than construction. The individual is not the origin of the belief infrastructure. She is the key that unlocks it.

Charismatic authority as institutional management problem. The post-coronation period reveals, more clearly than any other case in this series, the specific problem that charismatic authority creates for the institutions that have deployed it: the figure who operates from genuine conviction about divine mandate cannot be managed by the normal instruments of institutional authority. Joan could be given commands. She could not be made to obey commands that contradicted her voices. The Armagnac leadership had deployed an instrument that was partly outside their control from the moment they gave it institutional validation, and the specific way this problem was resolved — her capture without serious ransom effort, her trial without French intervention, her execution — is the most direct evidence in the series of how institutions manage the charismatic authority they can no longer control without needing to appear to have abandoned it.

The rehabilitation as myth construction in plain view. Every belief infrastructure in this series generates a founding myth, and most of those myths are sufficiently distant in time and documentation from their construction that the construction process must be inferred from the gap between what the myth claims and what the archaeology shows. Joan's rehabilitation was conducted twenty-five years after the events it reframed, by a commission whose mandate from Charles VII was explicit, whose procedural choices were clearly oriented toward a predetermined outcome, and whose theological moves are all documented. This is the founding myth construction process visible in real time, in its own documentation, with its motivations recorded and its methods preservable. For understanding how subsequent regimes — Valois, Bourbon, Republican, Napoleonic — could continue to appropriate the Joan myth for their own legitimating purposes across five centuries of political change, the rehabilitation is the key document: it established the myth in its most durable institutional form, and that durability was the product of deliberate choices made by people with specific institutional interests in making the myth permanent.

The Maid of Orléans did not save France. A constrained elite faction facing a specific institutional problem reached for the available belief infrastructure, identified the figure who best embodied the prophetic template, arranged the institutional validation that made the deployment safe, and used the resulting force multiplication to solve a political problem that military force

alone could not. The theological claim that God spoke through Joan was believed by the French soldiers who fought under her standard, by the French population that received news of her victories as confirmation of divine favor, and quite possibly by Joan herself. That belief was real. It was also, at the institutional level where decisions about deployment and abandonment were made, instrumentally managed toward ends whose character the people managing them understood clearly, if not always in the analytical vocabulary this paper applies.

The voices Joan heard — their origin, their nature, their ultimate theological status — are questions that the framework neither answers nor needs to answer. What the framework shows is that the question itself, which consumed five months of a trial and has occupied scholars for six centuries, was the institutional battlefield on which the legitimacy of the French crown was actually contested. The answer to the theological question was the answer to the political one. That is why it mattered so much, to so many people, for so long.

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Research and composition by Claude (Anthropic).